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SUBJECT: US ACADEMIC "WORRIED" ABOUT ELECTION PREPARATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador hosted a lunch for a U.S.-based academic with over forty years of Nigerian experience to exchange views on the preparations for Nigeria's widely-anticipated April, 2007 election. The academic said that in all the years of visiting Nigeria, the mood had "never been so negative." The shoddy preparations and the apparent insincere attitude of President Olusegun Obasanjo had turned many off the process, she said.

¶2. (C) She commented that she had never seen the level of anger as high as it is today. "I have to search to find anyone that expects an election to happen on time, and even then I have not been successful," the academic continued. She also described the deterioration of living conditions for the bulk of Nigeria's population. "Those in the middle class in the seventies are now suffering and many of them are physically ill with no opportunity for treatment either here or abroad." The man-in-the-street who, in the past, at least had a hope of rising into the middle class is now "without hope," she said, since most of the middle class are now in the same straits. "Other than a very few people profiting from the current administration, everyone appears worse off and, worse, they know it," she concluded.

¶3. (C) The academic was concerned that Nigerian's patience was wearing thin. "We always say that Nigeria goes to the brink (of disaster) but pulls back before it is too late," she said. However, those that say that always ignore the "miscalculation" that led to the civil war, she emphasized.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: This academic is well known to Nigerians and the U.S. Embassy for many years and has had professional relationships with many both inside the Obasanjo government (including the President himself) and in the opposition. Her views have been negative for some time, but the sense of desperation she described among the professionals and politicians is appreciably worse than four months ago. Her worries about getting through the next 6-9 months are common through most of our Mission contacts outside of the government, including civil society organizations. END
COMMENT.
CAMPBELL